

## City says fill diversity post

With Albany's minority hiring lagging, mayor urged to make move

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ALBANY -- City lawmakers are calling on Mayor Jerry Jennings to hire an administrative boss to oversee Albany's efforts to eliminate persistent racial disparities in the city workforce.

Albany's administrative services commissioner's post, one the highest-ranking jobs in city government, has been vacant since the brief tenure of Troy Mackey ended in 2008 -- leaving Deputy Corporation Counsel Tara Wells as the department's interim leader.

While Wells told Common Council members Wednesday night that the department has made significant progress in recent weeks -- including filling a vacant staff position to assist with many of the programs aimed at ensuring equal opportunities -- some lawmakers said a July report from Treasurer Kathy Sheehan revealed that the city's workforce is still lagging woefully behind when it comes to diversity.

According to that January snapshot, 220 -- or 15.8 percent -- the city's 1,388 employees were black. That's up from 11 percent in 2005 but still well below the 28.7 percent of Albany's overall population that identifies itself as African American.

Similar disparities are also seen with women and other minorities.

The report also suggested that Albany's minority employees are also concentrated in relatively low-paying jobs because that 15.8 percent of the workforce identified as black earned just 11 percent of the total city payroll.

Wells detailed efforts -- such an upcoming EMT class to prepare residents for jobs in the fire department, where just 4.6 percent of employees are black -- that the city is making to recruit and cultivate qualified minorities for city jobs.

But some lawmakers said that amounts to a patchwork solution without a qualified person at the top to oversee it all.

Earlier this year, the council wrote to Jennings asking that he fill the commissioner's post but received no response, said Council President Carolyn McLaughlin.

"I want you to take back one message," McLaughlin told Wells, whose job as the city's second-highest-ranking lawyer includes many responsibilities other than administrative services, "that position needs to be filled."

One member of the public -- a former high-ranking affirmative action official with the state -- questioned how the city can seriously expect to make progress when it doesn't even have a current affirmative action plan.

"There's a bigger picture," said Berthlynn Terry, a former assistant commissioner with the state Department of Correctional Services and a member of the local NAACP chapter's executive board. "There's a whole community of Albany who is not being hired. It's not fair, it's not right ... and, in fact, it's criminal."

The council's request is likely to run headlong into the administration's desire to save money in the face of an estimated \$20 million budget deficit next year.

Jennings has said that the responsibility for diversifying the city workforce falls to everyone in City Hall, not just one department. City officials have also pointed to difficulties in retaining those high-ranking minority employees it does have when the state, offering better pay, often looks to poach them to improve its own numbers.

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